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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 000782

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SUBJECT: BOUTEFLIKA SEEKS TO RECONCILE THE UNRECONCILED

REF: 07 ALGIERS 1618

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Thomas F. Daughton;  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

**¶1.** (U) During his July 5 Algerian independence day speech to the military leadership, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika revisited the theme of national reconciliation, calling on Algerians to unite against extremism and "to put down the fire of Fitna." He underscored the need to pursue security and development goals in parallel to erase the consequences of Algeria's violent past. Bouteflika said that misguided groups in Algeria were preying on young people and undermining Algeria with false fatwas, destructive ideas and preaching that contradicts the tenants of Islam. He urged extremists to return to the "straight path", rejoin their families and contribute to the country's future. In a two-sided message, the president vowed that Algeria would use all means necessary to confront remaining terrorist elements, while leaving the door open to those who repent, "as they are the children of this good and generous land."

**¶2.** (SBU) On the same day, about 100 Algerians participated in a sit-in near the National Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (CNCPPDH), organized by the Algerian NGO SOS Disparus to commemorate the tenth anniversary of weekly protests staged by families of the disappeared (victims of 1990s violence who remain unaccounted for). In a July 5 communique, SOS Disparus declared that families of the disappeared wanted to use Algeria's independence day to register their outrage and disappointment concerning the government's efforts to reveal the truth behind the disappearances and to bring those responsible to justice. SOS Disparus characterized Bouteflika's 2005 Charter of Peace and National Reconciliation as a means to conceal the truth, noting that death certificates for the disappeared were issued without any meaningful inquiry into the cause of death. Echoing the sentiment of relatives of the disappeared, SOS Disparus President Fatmouzohra Yous said that, despite the issuance of death certificates, families would not give up their search for the truth.

**¶3.** (C) Reactions to Bouteflika's comments on national reconciliation shared with us by political party and civil society representatives underscored the continuing split in Algerian society between those who view reconciliation as a success and those who feel the charter has failed to address the social scars left by the violence of the 90s. The head of the Algerian Human Rights League, Mostefa Bouchachi, said that continuing protests by family members proved that the reconciliation charter was not working. Bouchachi commented that the policy lacked a comprehensive long-term approach and

warned that short-term solutions could have disastrous social consequences. Lawyer and human rights activist Khaled Bourayou shared this view and called the situation a "social time bomb." Compensation was only part of the solution, he said, adding that after more than a decade, the authorities remain reluctant to disclose the facts surrounding disappearances in the 90s. Karim Bahloul, the External Relations Officer of the opposition party Socialist Forces Front, said Bouteflika's speech offered nothing new, adding that instead of amnesty for terrorists, reconciliation should seek to alleviate Algerians' social concerns. Not surprisingly, National Liberation Front (FLN) Election Campaign Director Mohamed Frikha told us that Bouteflika's speech promised a continuation of the president's charter, which he asserted has already succeeded in helping Algeria overcome its security crisis.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Bouteflika has been largely silent about his cherished reconciliation program since the December 2007 suicide car bombs in Algiers. He chose to revive his message of forgiveness in his annual address to the senior ranks of the military, which furnished the hard core of the "eradicateurs" -- who advocated wiping out the terrorists -- in the 1990s. The speech also came just days after Bouteflika abruptly changed (or was forced to change) prime ministers from an Islamist sympathizer and strong supporter of the Charter to a man who calmly told Codel McCollum on June 30, "I am an eradicateur." While Bouteflika's speech highlighted the continuing split in Algerian society over reconciliation, it was also a public salvo in the largely hidden struggle within the leadership between the

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eradicateurs and those who favor amnesty. It is likely not accidental that the speech accompanied the promotion of 22 colonels to the rank of general. Many of them, one Islamist politician told us, were chosen by Bouteflika rather than the old-line military leadership. As the behind-the-scenes tug-of-war between eradicateurs and conciliators goes on, the frustration of an unreconciled population persists and Bouteflika's reconciliation program continues to walk a fine line between amnesty and aggression. The Charter of Peace and National Reconciliation officially expired in August 2006, but as Bouteflika pointedly reminded the audience on July 5, it remains applicable at the sole discretion of the president himself.

DAUGHTON